

**Individual agency:
Is the concept useful for the study of transitions to
adulthood and how does it related to policy?
The case of India**

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to adolescents’ sexual and reproductive transitions and needs?”**

Objectives

- **Concept of agency: dimensions, gender similarities and disparities; correlates**
- **How useful for the study of transitions to adulthood?**
- **What are implications for policy?**

Agency among young people

Agency: ability to make strategic life choices; affect ones own well being; exert influence over issues that matter to ones own welfare

Argued to be key in influencing young people's sexual and reproductive lives – marriage, sexual relations, contraception

Life skills programmes focus on building agency

Measurement of agency as applicable to young people has eluded research

Sources: NRC and Institute of Medicine 2005; Mensch 2006; Assaad and Bruce 1997; Malhotra et al. 2002; Jejeebhoy and Halli 2005.

Background

Background: Youth in India

Youth at a crossroads

- Healthier, better educated, exposed to technological changes, new ideas
- Patriarchal setting, norms prohibit social mixing, love marriage

Evidence of pre-marital romantic and sexual partnerships

- Recent state-level evidence: Sexual relations experienced among < 10% young women and 15-25% young men
- Little known about factors associated with these partnerships

Study: Formation of partnerships among youth, Pune district

Pune district

- **Economically developed district; opportunities for youth**
- **One of 6 districts in the state with high HIV prevalence**
- **Presence of NGOs to provide support for study participants**

Study design and sample

- **Sites include:**
 - **Rural: 90 villages, one *taluka*, population of about 100,000**
 - **Urban slum site: Pune city, population of about 100,000**
- **Community-based survey (N=8595) + qualitative methods**
- **Study population (ages 15-24): female and male; married (not addressed here) and unmarried**

Measures of agency, gender differences, correlates

Operationalising agency among young people

- **Experiential dimensions: decision making over life outcomes (education, timing of marriage, spouse, friends, leisure); freedom of movement.**
- **Perceptual dimensions: sense of self worth, attitudes – may be proxy measures capturing agency**
- **Awareness dimension: awareness of the world around, new ideas, sources of services**

Sources: NRC and Institute of Medicine 2005; Mensch 2006; Levitt-Dayal et al. 2003

Dimensions of agency: 5 indexes

Experiential

- **Freedom of movement (5):** can go unescorted -- shop, friend, place of entertainment, place of worship, outside the village
- **Decision-making (4):** friends, purchases, family outings, health

Perceptual

- **Sense of self-worth (6):** has good attributes, makes friends easily, satisfied with peer relationships, has parents' respect, can express opinions to elders, convince people about beliefs
- **Gender role attitudes (5):** education; marriage; work

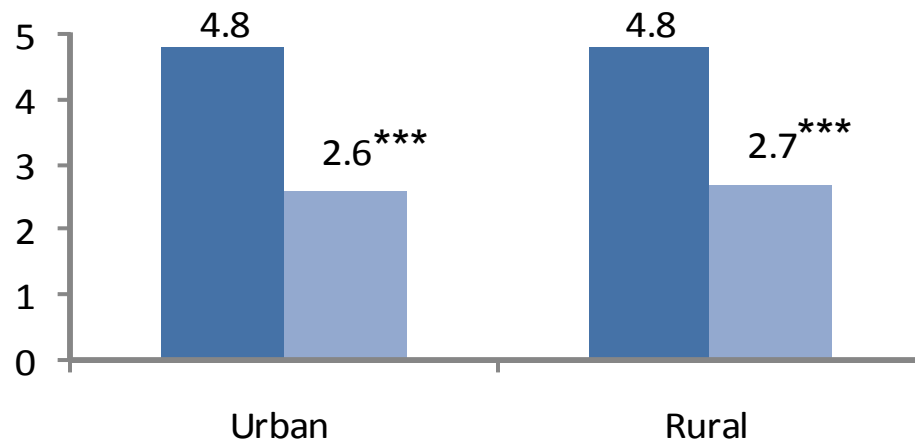
Awareness

- **Awareness of sexual and reproductive matters (7):** sex, pregnancy, contraception, HIV

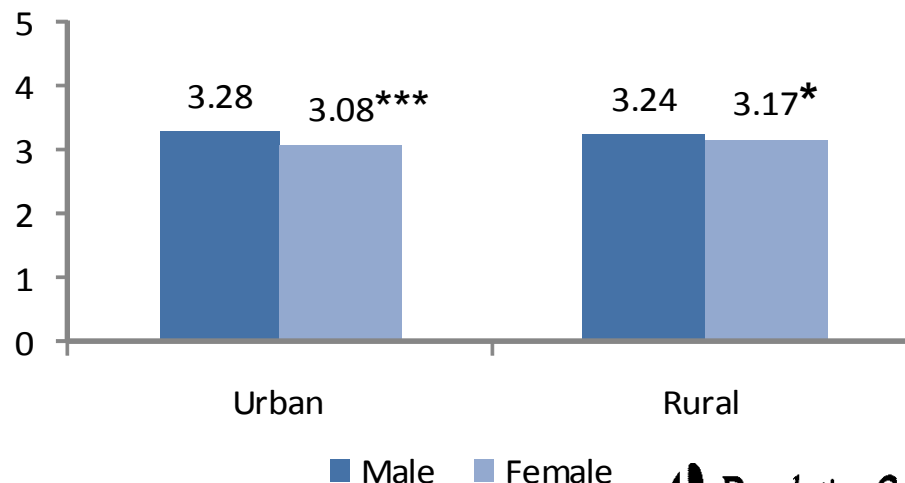
Experiential dimensions of agency

- Boys enjoy freedom of movement almost universally
- Wide and significant gender difference in ability to go outside village or neighbourhood unescorted
- Both young men and women report moderate role in decision-making on issues related to their lives
- Overall, gender differences in decision-making wider in urban than rural areas

Freedom of movement (mean no. of places R can go unescorted)



Decision-making (mean no. of decisions R takes part in)

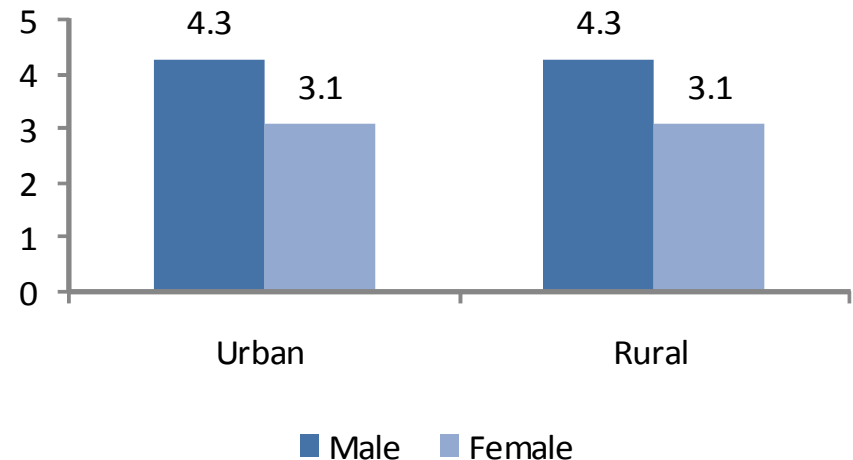


Male Female

Awareness dimension of agency

- Both young men and women have only moderate awareness of sexual and reproductive matters
- Wide and significant gender differences
 - Huge misconceptions about condoms among both young men and women, particularly young women
 - Knowledge of HIV high and comparable among young men and women
 - Knowledge of pregnancy and fertile period generally low

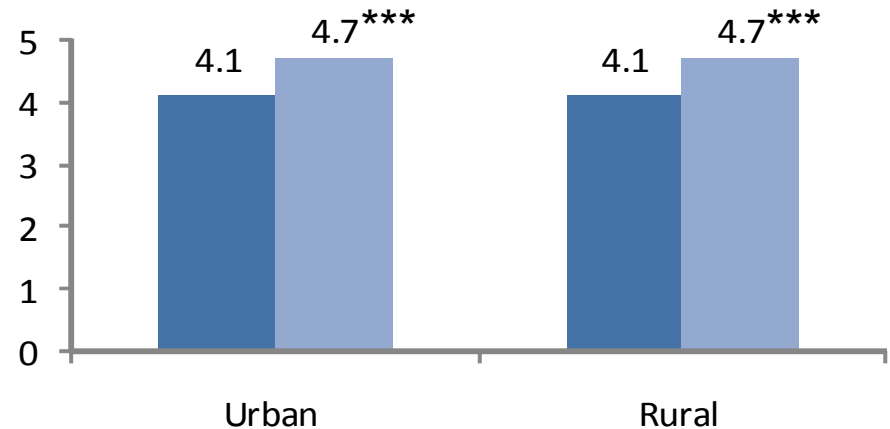
Awareness of sexual and reproductive matters (mean no. of correct responses)



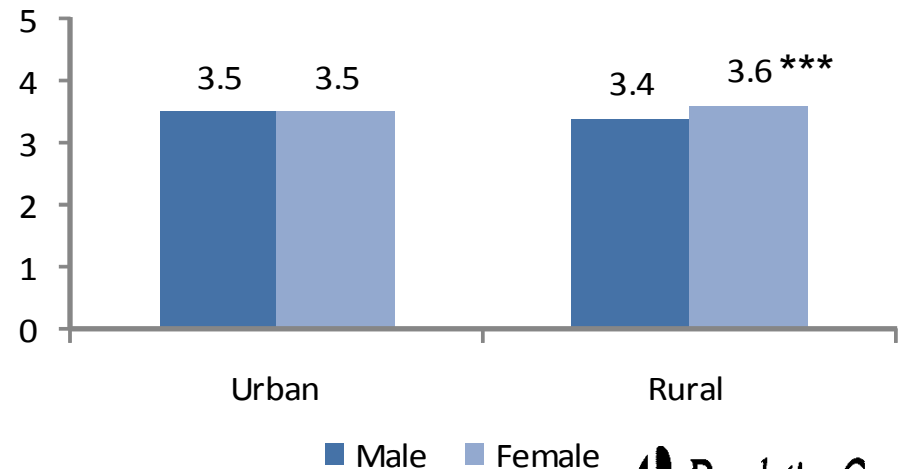
Perceptual dimensions of agency

- Gender role attitudes egalitarian among both – but young women more likely to report egalitarian attitudes, irrespective of residence
- Overall moderate sense of self-worth among both – but young women report equal or higher levels of self-worth
 - Reported higher levels of sense of self-worth in terms of good attributes, relationship with peers, or parent's respect
 - Very low sense of self worth in terms of talking to elders or convincing people

Gender role attitudes (mean no. of egalitarian attitudes reported)



Sense of self worth (mean no. of positive sense of self worth)



Summary: levels and gender differences

- **Agency is a multi-dimensional concept and it is not necessary that high levels of agency on any one implies high levels of agency on others**
- **Gender differences in dimensions of agency vary –**
 - **Experiential dimensions significantly higher among young men**
 - **Perceptual dimensions equal or higher among young women**
 - **Awareness significantly higher among young men**
- **Rural-urban slum differences in agency are even narrower than gender differences**

Correlates

- ***Individual attributes and capabilities:*** age, years of schooling, wage work
- ***Family and parent interaction:*** co-residence with both parents, supportive monitoring and supervision, parent-child communication and connection, absence of family violence
- ***Peer support system:*** group membership, frequency of peer contact, closeness of peer relations

Summary: correlates

Key correlates among both young women and men, net of age, household economic status and rural-urban residence:

- **Education**
- **Wage earning activity and the access to resources that this implies**
- **Strength of social networks through peers or group affiliation**

Less consistently

- **Parental strictness and experience of family violence limit agency while interaction and closeness to parents promote it.**

While levels of agency display gender differences, correlates are by and large similar for young women and young men

How useful for the study of transitions to adulthood?

Agency as a transition endpoint

Growing Up Global: 6 attributes of a successful transition include:

“The capability to make choices through the acquisition of a sense of self and a sense of personal competence;”

and

“...the knowledge and means to sustain health during adulthood”

Agency's link to SR transitions

Suggestion that agency may enable young people to make informed condom use choices and negotiate safe outcomes

% of sexually experienced youth reporting condom use

	Young Men (Age 15-24)*	Young Women (Age 15-24)
Decision making	+*	(+)
Mobility	+	(0)
Gender role attitudes	+	(+)
Sense of self-worth	+*	(+)
Knowledge of SRH	+*	(+)

*logistic regression controlling age, rural-urban residence and household economic status

What are implications for policy?

Implications for policy

- **SRH policies and programmes must go beyond ABC**
- **Concerted efforts needed to influence agency:**
- **Need to encourage the completion of secondary schooling; for the shorter run and for the out-of-school, the implementation of life and livelihood skill building activities**
- **Peer networks important – need to make these supportive and well informed**
- **Supportive interaction with parents: programmes that engage parents, build parent skills in supporting young people's transition to adulthood.**
- **Need to track changes in agency**
 - **Need to refine measurement of agency among youth**
 - **Need a benchmark**

Acknowledgements

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